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MARCH 2007

Arizona Highways

5 Wildflower Trips

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Beyond their ability to fly, birds, bats, butterflies and bees share in their capacity to conduct a symphony of desert blooms. This month, imbibe the fruits of their labor and take a walk on the wildflower side of the Sonoran Desert with our expanded wildflower-viewing guide. Visit arizonahighways.com and click on our March "Trip Planner."

HUMOR Our writer compares apples and oranges to golf and meatloaf.

WEEKEND GETAWAY Fabulous food, fine art and plenty of family fun—Scottsdale has it all.

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RED ROCK BLUES A ray of sunset light, aimed laserlike at Cathedral Rock out of a cloud-laden Sedona sky, resulted in this dramatic, un-"Photoshopped" moment captured on film. See portfolio, page 22. PETER SCHWEPKER
■ To order a print of this photograph, see information on opposite page.

FRONT COVER Filtered light lends an ethereal quality to the translucent wings and delicate antennae and proboscis of a nectaring sulphur butterfly. See story, page 8. JOYCE BERQUIST

BACK COVER Velvet mesquite trees reign over a bacchanalian festival of Mexican goldpoppies, indigo-blue lupines and reddish-purple owl clover in the Quinlan Mountains on the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation. See story, page 8. JACK DYKINGA
■ To order a print of this photograph, see information on opposite page.

Photographic Prints Available

■ Prints of some photographs are available for purchase, as designated in captions. To order, call toll-free (866) 962-1191 or visit www.magazineprints.com.

dear editor

editor@arizonahighways.com

Best Holiday Issue Ever

The December 2006 issue is the best holiday issue ever! What a treasure. The explanation on page 2 of how the issue came about is downright eloquent. I am sending copies to all of my friends across the country. I hope you printed more than usual because I am sure everyone who reads this issue will feel the same way. Kudos to you and your staff and a great big thank you.

—Sandy Futch, Tempe

Longing for Home

Your beautiful article, "Edge of Transformation," in the December 2006 issue almost moved me to tears. High compliments indeed! I lived in Arizona but now live in Texas and miss Arizona so much it literally hurts. Your article brought that feeling to the page, of feeling alive and connected to a place of beauty and fear. I feel alive in Arizona in a way that I could never feel here. Hopefully, I'll make my way home again someday for good—if my boyfriend would just decide that Arizona is the place for him, not Texas!

—Annie Fitzsimmons, Dallas, TX

Saved From the Mobs

I watched televison and wondered if I really missed anything after last Thanksgiving, as Black Friday mobs trampled each other for "bargains." Oh, well, bring in the mail. Then I opened your gifts. Plural, of course—stunning beauty and soaring words. Can there be a better offering from one friend to another? I think not. Thank you, one and all, for the "Greeting Card" to my world in the December 2006 issue.

—Rita Ryan Micklish, La Mesa, CA

Ode to Shelton

Richard Shelton was my poetry teacher at the University of Arizona in 1978 and 1979. I admired him when I was his student. He worked tirelessly with the students, encouraging us always and "teasing out" the best writing we had to offer. I knew then that as a published author, he probably had a lot of important things to do, but I always felt he gave me all the time and attention I needed. His poem "Five Lies About the Moon" (December '06) demonstrates the incredible talent of Mr. Shelton: his authentic voice, his level of comfort in revealing the quirky way he sees the world, his sense of humor, his keen sense of observation, his empathy and his love of nature. Reading the poem, I felt like I was visiting with an old friend. Thank you.

—Dana (Rudner) Denney, Tucson

Reflections on Pearl Harbor

Two comments after reading "Black Tears Still Seep" ("Along the Way," December '06): It is important to note that the Rt. Rev. Julius W. Atwood, the Episcopal Bishop of Arizona, gave the invocation prior to the launching on June 19, 1915. To quote his diary of that date, "Gave the Invocation at the launching of the battleship Arizona in New York." As a personal aside, I wish the article's author had, indeed, been able to visit the *U.S.S. Arizona*. He might have experienced, as did my wife and I, the awesome wonder of visiting the burial site of many hundreds of its crew. He would have "heard" the silence of the normally raucous tourists as we all stood topside and remembered President Franklin D. Roosevelt's words now etched in our minds, ". . . a date which will live in infamy . . . ."

—Rolfe B. Chase, Prescott

The Grandest Story

Thanks for the thoughtful, insightful article, "The Grandest Gym," by Lawrence W. Cheek ("Along the Way," November '06). His premise that as humans we lose by trying to reduce nature to something that can be measured by our own human limitations is right on target. I've put this article in my personal "Words of Wisdom" file to refer to again and again. I hope we'll read more from him soon.

—Jan Gulledge, Fort Myers, FL

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ARIZONA HIGHWAYS

MARCH 2007 VOL. 83, NO. 3

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Arizona Highways® (ISSN 0004-1521) is published monthly by the Arizona Department of Transportation. Subscription price: $24 a year in the U.S., $41 outside the U.S. Single copy: $3.99 U.S. Send subscription correspondence and change of address information to *Arizona Highways*, 2039 W. Lewis Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85009. Periodical postage paid at Phoenix, AZ and at additional mailing office. CANADA POST INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATIONS MAIL PRODUCT (CANADIAN DISTRIBUTION) SALES AGREEMENT NO. 41220511. SEND RETURNS TO QUEBECOR WORLD, P.O. BOX 875, WINDSOR, ON N9A 6P2, POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Arizona Highways*, 2039 W. Lewis Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85009.

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POWELL REFLECTIONS
Late light on a Lake Powell inlet illuminates the tough choice facing any photo-fisherman. PETER ALESHIRE

all who wander

by Peter Aleshire, editor

The Eternal Choice: Fish or Take Pictures?

FISHING POLE IN HAND, camera at the dangle, I stand on the fan deck of my rented houseboat surveying the glitter of the lengthening light on the waters of Lake Powell.

Fish or take pictures?

Fish or take pictures?

Fish or take pictures?

The question seems fraught with significance, a touchstone to the haphazard improvisation of my life—the crumbling keystone to my character.

Either that, or I'm indulging in irritating overanalysis.

But here's the thing.

I'm a passionately mediocre fisherman.

And an intensely so-so photographer.

And I cannot tell if I just need to focus or if I am mediocre by nature with a short attention span that has condemned me to a lifetime of unimpressive competence at an impressive list of things.

But for years past, I have always equivocated at this moment when the light is saturated and the fish are satiated, skittering back and forth between my passions like an engaged man sneaking out to a singles bar out of a pathetic fear of commitment.

Suddenly decisive, I set down my camera and stride down the gangplank across an expanse of sand to reach a peninsula made of swirled, fossilized sand dunes.

I spend the next hour, casting and retrieving and working the shoreline as I plunk a pale plastic worm with an engaging double tail into a reflective back bay of possibility. I get only ambiguous nibbles, but at intervals a striped bass pursuing a stray shad breaks the surface with a glimmer and a plop, egging me ever on.

Then the wind dies. In the sudden stillness, I notice that the reddening buttes and the shadowed shreds of the sky are reflecting perfectly in the mirrored surface of the inlet to my right.

I am instantly seized by a lust for that image.

I throw down my fishing pole and without reflection, run back to the houseboat, seize my camera and sprint back to my spot.

The wind has resumed, spoiling the sky's mirror. No matter. I will wait. The wind will die.

In that moment, a boil of striped bass feeding on shad breaks the surface to my left. Shad are little minnowlike baitfish that form the basis of the underwater food chain in this 186-mile-long reservoir. Striped bass hunt together to herd schools of shad into tight bunches near the lake surface or up against the shoreline so that the voracious bass can tear into the struggling mass. I have seen expert bass fishermen cast repeatedly into such a mass and pull in big stripers with every cast.

So I put down my camera, seize my pole and cast toward the now-vanished stir in the water. I cast four times without result.

The wind dies. The reflection returns.

I put down my pole and take up my camera.

Right in front of me, the water erupts into a shimmer of shad.

I grab my pole and cast.

The wind comes up. The shad vanish.

Suddenly, the water comes alive again opposite my position where the striped bass have trapped the shad right up against the shore. Desperate to escape, a silvery shad leaps out of the water up onto the muddy beach. It quivers there, all quicksilver and fear.

I drop my pole and my camera and run around the small cove toward the desperately dying shad. I sink into the mud to my calves as I flounder to reach the dying fish. I find it iridescently alive and so grab it and cast it back into the lake, where life and bass await.

Then I flail back through the muck, extract my flip-flops from the bottom of the bog of my footprints and return to my camera and fishing pole, having missed both the perfect light and the pack of bass.

And so, neither fishing nor photographing, I sit perfectly still as the darkness gathers, the wind dies and the silence deepens. Now and then, the soft plop of the last bass in the last light carries to me across 200 yards of dark water.

And in that moment, I am passionately mediocre, but perfectly content.

editor@azonahighways.com

Photography Lessons in the Tip of a Brush

by Jerry Sieve, guest columnist

IN THE 30 YEARS I'VE ROAMED ARIZONA photographing its wonderful landscape, I've experienced thousands of beautiful scenes.

Now I'm a painter, too. And for the past four years I've been re-creating my photographs on canvas. Because of this dual role, I've learned plenty from both sides of the camera and palette.

I have no plans to give up photography. Certain images make stronger expressive statements as photographs than as paintings—and vice versa. Some of my landscape photographs improved when I re-created them on canvas. The truth is, I've learned much from studying the techniques of the masters of both photography and painting.

My photographic influences come from the work of Ansel Adams, Edward Weston and Edward Curtis, while the styles of Monet, Van Gogh, Renoir and Corot hold artistic sway over my painting. These masters have helped me learn to "see" the world in a particular way. This is the key word—to "see" the world.

In 18 years of teaching photo workshops, I have stressed that the camera lens does not see in the same way as the human eye-brain connection. Some have a hard time understanding this difference. Many are disappointed when what they see with their eyes doesn't appear in their photographs. Learning to see as the camera lens sees requires work and cultivation.

Painting has helped me understand even more of the subtleties in each scene. As a photographer, I thought I noticed all the subtleties, but as a painter I became acutely aware of barely-there light and color effects. Arizona painter Sergio Ladron de Guevara calls this process "observation." In truth, even many people claiming to be artists will look, but not see.

As a landscape photographer, I understand how light affects the land, which explains why I work in the early and late hours of the day.

That long study of light has helped me paint, which requires expressing a particular light value on canvas. However, not all painters and photographers understand how to see light and its effects. And if one cannot see light, then it's impossible to render it in any medium.

So which is more difficult? Which is more artistic? Neither. Painting and photography are both forms of artistic expression that require the artist to learn the lessons of light.

Photography is challenging because one must know how the camera, lens and film (or digital file) relationship affects the final image. Landscape photographers have no control over what the Earth will present on a particular day. If it's overcast, well, it's overcast and so may not yield the image we envision. That makes landscape photography among the most difficult forms, since atmospheric conditions can overwhelm all the photographer's skill and knowledge. As Ansel Adams said, "Landscape photography is the supreme test of the photographer—and often the supreme disappointment."

However, painters can render whatever light conditions they choose. Still, the subtleties of colors and values will make a painting, but without a keen sense of light, all the skillful brushwork in the world will not result in a great landscape painting.

I'm fortunate to view these grand traditions from both sides, so that photography helps my painting and painting improves my photography. AH

DOUBLE VISION
Photographer Jerry Sieve developed an alter ego: Jerry Sieve, the painter. Re-creating his favorite landscape photographs on canvas forced him to relearn the subtleties of light and color for a different medium. BOTH BY JERRY SIEVE

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Frequent* Arizona Highways *contributer Jerry Sieve will exhibit his photographs and paintings through March 25 at the Arizona Fine Art Expo at 23023 N. Scottsdale Road in Scottsdale (southeast corner of Scottsdale and Pinnacle Peak roads).*

online **Find expert photography advice and information at arizonahighways.com (click on "Photography").**

PAUL AND JOYCE BERQUIST

And for Dessert . . . What?

HUMAN GUYS BUMMED OUT BY THE DATING SCENE can at least comfort themselves that they are not praying mantises, whose love life is the classic bad blind date. Everything starts out all lovey dovey, with the pint-sized male wooing the amorous female. Alas, the moment the little guy thinks he's Mr. Macho, she twists around, traps him in her barbed embrace and commences to devour him. A handful of other insects also consume their mates during the reproductive process, for reasons that still befuddle biologists. Praying mantises are particularly open-minded about whom they'll place on the dinner table. They're fond of close relatives like cockroaches and grasshoppers, but even the bitty baby mantises will sometimes dine on hatching siblings. We cruised the Internet and found some perfectly appalling pictures of mantises eating hummingbirds. On the other hand, our online research safari also yielded a fascinating video clip of a young girl popping a squirming praying mantis into her mouth and chomping happily away. Which perhaps brings us full circle to the very scary modern dating scene.


Franciscan Renewal Center

Labyrinths Circling a Mystery

THE ANCIENTS LEFT THE CONCENTRIC, connecting paths of the labyrinth symbol all over the world, but no one actually knows what it means. Priests or artists carved labyrinths into stone in diverse places such as Peru, Iceland, India, England—and here in Arizona. Employed as religious, spiritual or cultural symbols from ancient times to today, the designs can be found at Baboquivari Peak, Oraibi, Casa Grande and at the Franciscan Renewal Center, also known as the Casa, in Scottsdale.

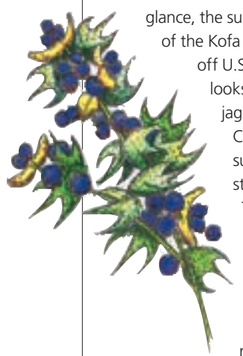
Some believe labyrinths represent life's journey with all its twists and turns. Different from the dead ends and wrong turns of a maze, labyrinths offer only one way in and one way out with no possibility of going astray.

In Roman times, walking a classic seven-circle labyrinth may have been a substitute for long pilgrimages. But you don't have to travel back in time to walk a labyrinth. Situated at the foot of Mummy Mountain, the Casa's labyrinth offers visitors the chance to walk its paths to help clear the mind, seek a solution, meditate or simply enjoy some peace and quiet in the desert.

Information: toll-free (800) 356-3247 or (480) 948-7460; www.thecasa.org.

—Sally Benford

A Berry, Berry Tough Barberry



NEVER JUDGE A DESERT by its thorns. At first glance, the sun-blasted volcanic landscape of the Kofa National Wildlife Refuge just off U.S. Route 95 north of Yuma looks terminally barren. But the jagged peaks of the Kofa and Castle Dome mountains harbor surprising treasures and a strange bit of holiday cheer.

The 665,400 acres of pristine Sonoran Desert boast bighorn sheep, saguaros, desert olives and skunk bushes, plus remains of mines from the early 1900s. Better yet, the refuge harbors some unlikely survivors. Palm Canyon at the west end of the refuge hides the only palm trees native to Arizona, probably escapees from the last Ice Age. Now, burst forth with Christmas carols to celebrate the unlikely survival of the Kofa Mountain barberry, a 3-foot-tall evergreen shrub with hollylike leaves, yellow flowers and small blue-black berries. Known to grow only there and in the Ajo Mountains to the south, the barberry's closest relatives have produced drugs, dyes, jams and jellies. The other barberry bushes live in assorted woodlands, but the Kofa species makes a living in a place that goes months—even years—without rain. Berry impressive.

—Buzz Brandt

Parkin' It

WITH 16,500 ACRES of desert preserve in its boundaries, South Mountain Park in Phoenix ranks as the world's largest city park. Petroglyphs by the ancient Hohokam Indians dot the landscape, and miles of trails wind through the Sonoran Desert habitat. Only 36,000 people enjoyed the solitude of this protected park when it first opened to the public in 1924. Today, more than 3 million people sample South Mountain Park's scenic roads and hiking trails each year.

—Carrie Miner

People Don't Die in Yuma—or Was It Just Pride?

IN 1885 YUMA WAS A BUSTLING TRADE CENTER. Here, the Southern Pacific Railroad crossed the Colorado River, and steamboats chugged upstream and back. Most supplies and visitors to western Arizona arrived through Yuma and, even though the temperatures were unbearably hot in the summer, the residents were proud of Yuma. The April 4, 1885, edition of the *Yuma Sentinel* newspaper gleefully copied this paragraph from Tucson's *Arizona Citizen*:

"Every issue of the Yuma papers contains notices of one or more births or marriages but very seldom death. People don't die there—in fact they have too much pride in their town to be caught dead within its limits."

—Janet Webb Farnsworth

Balding Frequent Fliers

BALD EAGLES RACK UP a lot of frequent-flier miles, according to a new study conducted by the Arizona Game and Fish Department and the Army National Guard at Camp Navajo.

"Some eagles travel up to 2,100 miles north from Arizona into different parts of Canada for the summer," says Arizona Game and Fish biologist Mylea Bayless.

Eagles use parts of Camp Navajo, a National Guard training and storage facility about 8 miles west of Flagstaff. Biologists wanted to know if activities there affected wintering bald eagles in northern Arizona. So biologists trapped six eagles during the winter of 2004 and gave them holiday gifts of a sort—lightweight backpacks equipped with GPS-satellite transmitters. Signals broadcast six times daily enabled researchers to track the eagles' migrations.

"It's exciting to see how far the birds travel," says Arizona Game and Fish biologist Valerie Horncastle.

—Kimberly Hosey

Fort Huachuca Museum Displays an Intelligent Past

WHOEVER CLAIMS "MILITARY" AND "INTELLIGENCE" DON'T GO TOGETHER has never toured the U.S. Army Intelligence Museum at Fort Huachuca in Sierra Vista. Where else can you find street signs for both "Counter" and "Intelligence"?

Since its opening in 1995, the museum has been a teaching tool for the U.S. Army Intelligence School at the fort, which once housed the famous Buffalo Soldiers of Apache War fame. The museum now includes three concrete sections of the late and unlamented Berlin Wall and a strange group portrait of the Army cryptography class of 1918 that spells "knowledge is power" in Morse code based on how the people pictured turned their heads.

Serious code breakers will find several code-breaking machines including a World War II Nazi message-encrypting Enigma machine and a cleverly encoded 1886 letter from the Mexican government to the governor of Sonora informing the governor not to trust Geronimo.

Need more? How about a pair of early unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), the ancestors of UAVs now in use in Iraq. In fact, the museum covers the development of military intelligence beginning with the Revolutionary War and progressing through Operation Desert Storm, all for free.

Visitors to the Fort Huachuca museum need a driver's license with a photo ID, car registration and proof of insurance to enter the post.

Probably it's best not to try to get a laugh at the door with that "military intelligence" oxymoron joke. It wouldn't be, well, smart.

Information: (520) 533-5736.

—Jane Eppinga


U.S. Army Intelligence operators in the field


Steward Observatory Mirror Lab

Reflecting on the Galaxies

THE STEWARD OBSERVATORY MIRROR LAB may hug the east side of the University of Arizona's football stadium, but the lab sure doesn't hide in the shadows. There they developed the unique honeycomb design for massive telescope mirrors and created the largest telescope mirror in the world.

A free one-hour tour introduces guests to the process, people and machinery that turn glass into a vision of the universe. For security and safety purposes, the tour requires a photo ID and closed-toed shoes. Make your reservations at least 10 days in advance. In exchange, you'll receive a trip into a giant's workshop and your own view of what it takes to connect with other worlds.

Information: (520) 621-1022

—Kathleen Walker

THESE TWO PAGES, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: RICHARD MAACK; TOM VEZO; COURTESY FORT HUACHUCA; EDWARD McCAIN; PETER KROCEK; ILLUSTRATION BY RANDY SUMMERLIN

Bees Gotta Buzz

Sonoran Spring Has Sprung—Cue the Pollinators

by Frank Jennings

The hummers hover.
The bumblebees buzz.
The poppies progress.

For against all plausibility, the symphony of spring once more shimmers up from the hard, jagged soil of the Sonoran Desert, life's intricate instruments creating a rising composition of joy, all petaled and fragrant. Cue the pollinators. Forget "desert," as in bleak and brown. Think wild—as in flower.

SPECIAL DELIVERY **Strands of mature pollen, called viscin threads, pack the sticky body of a honeybee with reproductive power inside a cholla cactus blossom (left).**
PAUL AND JOYCE BERQUIST

The bountiful blooms of an evening primrose (inset) await an overnight pickup from nocturnal workers. Honeybees are not the world's only pollinators. However, in North America alone, they are responsible for approximately 3.5 million acres of crops.
RANDY PRENTICE

Every spring, following a decently wet winter, the ancient and intricate conspiracy between flowers and flutterers conjures perhaps the planet's richest display of wildflowers from an unlikely desert landscape.

So tropical bats and iridescent hummingbirds set forth from South America to follow a pollen path into North America.

So the monarch butterflies set out from Mexican forests on a generations-long migration linked to the bloom of milkweed.

So pipevine swallowtail butterflies lay eggs on their namesake plants, so their caterpillars can chow down on poisonous compounds that protect them from hungry birds.

So the white spot in the throat of the bee-pollinated purple lupine turns pink so other bees won't waste their time.

So tarantula hawks take a break from hunting hairy monsters to pollinate yellow mesquite flowers.

So yucca moths deliberately move pollen balls from one yucca to another before sealing up their eggs in a flower's ovaries, knowing the emerging larvae will somehow know not to eat all the seeds.

These intricate relationships between plants and pollinators date back millions of years, life's dance of dependence. They come on exuberant display every three to five years in the Sonoran Desert, when a wet winter dribbling into a mild spring spurs a vigorous regional growth. About once a decade, the weather conspires to produce a mind-wrenching riot of wildflowers all across the Sonoran Desert.

Ironically, the hardships that produce a desert also foster these outbursts. In areas with year-round rain, plants cover every bare patch of ground. But desert rains won't sustain continuous ground cover and force the permanent plants to scatter themselves widely. So when the capricious weather patterns produce a wet year, the permanent plants can't soak it all in.

Cue the wildflowers, whose seeds wait in the soil for just such an opportunity. In some areas, past outbursts of wildflowers have left 200,000 seeds in every square yard of desert soil. These wildflowers are brilliant opportunists that can soak up every drop of extra water, even in a very wet year.

But desert wildflowers face a second crucial problem: They need pollinators.

HOME SWEET HOME

While the white petals of the saguaro cactus blossom, Arizona's state flower, rely on cross-pollination from a variety of winged strangers to survive, the gilded flicker (above) makes its home inside the mother plant. PAUL AND JOYCE BERQUIST

As the sun sets, the fruits of pollinator labor come to life in the shape of sand verbena and birdcage evening primroses that carpet the Mohawk Dunes near Yuma (right). JACK DYKINGA

To order a print of this photograph, see inside front cover.

NECTAR OF THE GODS
Nectar isn't essential to the reproductive process, but it draws pollinators to plants such as the cuplike barrel cactus flower (below right) and tubular agave blossoms, whose pollinators include nectar-feeding bats (below left).
LEFT TO RIGHT: TOM VEZO, JACK DYKINGA

This link between plants and pollinators has shaped the evolution of life on the planet, since the roughly 300,000 species of flowering plants provide food and oxygen to help sustain the creeping, crawling and flying creatures. Fortunately, the great array of flowers has spawned a heartening variety of pollinators.

In fact, flowering plants have made possible the diversification of life. Flower imprints in the fossil record started some 100 million years ago, halfway through the long reign of the dinosaurs. Until then, plants relied on the wind and spores to reproduce. Flowers evolved to enlist the help of pollinators, which dramatically increased the efficiency of pollination. The increased mixing of genes sped up the plant diversification, which created the specialized habitats that drove an increase in the variety of insects and animals.

The number of plant species rose from an estimated 500 some 286 million years ago to 22,000 some 65 million years ago and on to 300,000 today, thanks largely to the "invention" of flowers. Of course, the alliance comes at a cost. Plants devote roughly 10 to 18 percent of their resources to producing flowers, pollen and nectar to keep up their end of the relationship.

Pollinators play an especially vital role in the Sonoran Desert, with its struggling, widely spaced year-round plants and the patiently waiting seeds of the annuals. Rather than a few dominant pollinators, the desert has produced pollinators for every niche and pattern. For instance, one survey concluded that the 680 different flowering plant species in the desert and mountains around Tucson are pollinated by 1,000 different species of bees—which represent nearly one-quarter of the bee species found in all of North America.

The diversity of desert bees provides a perfect example of the remarkable relationships on display in a Sonoran spring.

Desert bees range from itty-bitty to ponderous. The desert boasts both the world's smallest bee—the *Perdita minima*, .08 of an inch long—and the 1.5-inch-long wood-boring carpenter bee. Blind to the color red, bees prefer flowers that are sweet-smelling and loaded with nectar. Most desert bees live in burrows, some more than a foot long. Semisocial bees like the cactus bee crowd hundreds of thousands of burrows in a space the size of a couple of tennis courts to take advantage of the spring flowering of saguaros, prickly pears and chollas. Bees pollinate an estimated 80 percent of desert flowers, and only the deserts of Israel can compete with the Sonoran for bee diversity.

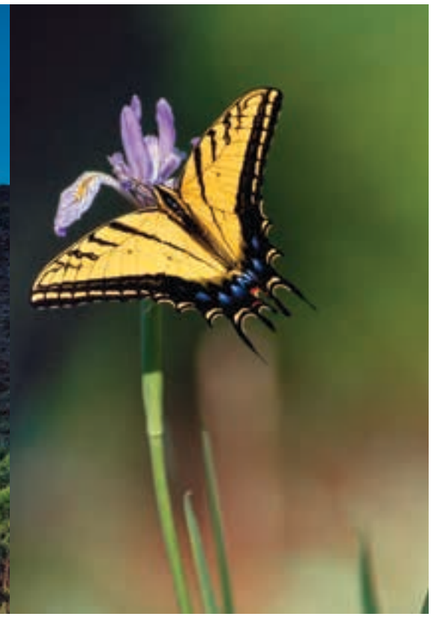
THE PERFECT MIX
Cross-pollination can bring the dry desert landscape near the Superstition Mountains (left) alive with a plethora of Mexican goldpoppies and scorpionweed. Just add water. JACK DYKINGA

To order a print of this photograph, see inside front cover.

PETAL PUSHERS

Alluring soaptree yuccas in the Pinaleno Mountains (below left) offer a last call to daytime pollinators. RANDY PRENTICE

Like retail stores at Christmas, many plants have evolved to attract pollinators, marketing themselves with competitive sights and smells to avoid extinction. A two-tailed tiger swallowtail butterfly (below right) finds a sweet deal. TOM VEZO



On the other hand, desert bees face a tough competitive threat from highly social European honeybees, which are helped along by beekeepers whose portable hives pollinate at least 30 percent of the region's crops. A single honeybee colony forages over a 60-square-mile area and stashes 85 pounds of pollen per year. That would be like people in Phoenix foraging throughout the entire state and spilling over into California, according to one biologist's estimate.

In return for pollination, plants pack their pollen with amino acids, proteins, fatty acids, vitamins, minerals and carbohydrates the bees need. Moreover, the nectar provides the quick energy needed to power the bees' flight muscles. Many desert flowers also provide oils vital to the bees but useless to the plants. The bees collect the oils with scrapers on their legs, then either mix the oils with pollen to feed to their larvae or use the oils to produce a musky scent that drives lusty bees wild.

Other pollinators like butterflies also depend on compounds in flowers, nectar and pollen. Some 250 species of butterflies flutter over desert wildflowers. Most stick close to the plants on which they lay their eggs, since their caterpillar larvae usually have adapted to digesting the defensive chemicals of only certain plants. Besides gladdening the hearts of anyone with eyes, butterflies showcase the complexity of living systems.

Consider the connections between the pipevine swallowtail and the pipevine plant. The plant produces small, musky flowers that look so much like a mouse's ear that they attract the mindless attentions of a blood-sucking fly. The flower traps the fly inside overnight, to make sure the tiny insect crawls about long enough to pass along pollen from the last plant it visited. Then along comes a metallic blue pipevine swallowtail, gussied up with red and yellow dots, to lay its eggs on the vine. The resulting purplish caterpillar thrives on the plant's protective compounds and even turns those toxins into its own defense against hungry birds.

Nearly every family of butterflies flurries through the desert. The white, yellow or orange sulphurs often congregate around mud puddles to drink and absorb minerals and salts. The jewel-like gossamer wing butterflies feed on poisonous desert mistletoes. And the booming family of brush-footed butterflies includes such restless souls as the monarchs, fritillaries, admirals and painted ladies, which sometimes produce enormous population surges that spatter the windshields of cars hurtling, heedless, through a desert spring.

Clad in their signature skirt of Mexican goldpoppies, lupines and cholla cacti, the Superstition Mountains wear springtime well. TOM DANIELSEN

Spring Wildflower Guide

Wildflowers, like many beautiful things, prefer perfect conditions—just enough rain and sun without too many ants and kangaroo rats. In a perfect Sonoran Desert year, wildflowers outshine even Arizona sunsets, producing one of the planet's most spectacular outbursts of blooms and their pollinators. For the state's parks and gardens, wildflower season means busy trails and camera flashes. (For wildflower updates, call the Arizona State Parks Wildflower Hotline at (602) 542-4988.)

BUENOS AIRES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Southwest of Tucson, 38 miles south of Three Points on State Route 286 at Milepost 7.5

Drive along Pronghorn Drive or hike the Arivaca Cienega Trail, and see the caltrops and Mexican goldpoppies compete for attention with morning glories and lupines. Caltrops have a slight advantage with five petals instead of four, but lupines attract more attention because their leaves tilt to follow the sun. For those itching to get out of the car, the visitors center offers small exhibits on natural history and interpretive signs that explain the ins and outs of hydrology. Watch for endangered masked bobwhite quail and wary herds of pronghorn antelope. (520) 823-4251; www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/arizona/buenosaires/index.html.

DESERT BOTANICAL GARDEN

1201 N. Galvin Parkway, Phoenix

If Mother Nature keeps all the rain to herself and cancels wildflower season, this garden offers the perfect backup plan—the Harriet K. Maxwell Wildflower Trail and the new Desert Herb Garden. The wildflower trail has all the usual suspects with some other interesting plants thrown in, including the *Monardella arizonica*, which is native to the state but hard to find. Its leaves give off a minty scent when crushed. The Desert Herb Garden, another new addition, showcases native herbs and their medicinal uses. (480) 941-1225; www.dbg.org.

LOST DUTCHMAN STATE PARK

6109 N. Apache Trail, Apache Junction

Made famous by stories of hidden gold, this state park owes a lot to the past for its present popularity. The Dutchman himself, a fellow named Jacob Waltz, probably didn't pay attention to the flowers blooming near the Superstition Mountains when he kept the location of his reputed 1870s goldmine hidden. But the Papago lilies and lupines scattered along Jacob's Crosscut Trail have wowed visitors for years. The yellow blooms of the brittlebush, which early missionaries used to make incense, also await those with a keen eye. (480) 982-4485; www.pr.state.az.us/Parks/parkhtml/dutchman.html.

ORGAN PIPE CACTUS NATIONAL MONUMENT

Off State Route 85, south of Ajo

Cruising down Ajo Mountain Drive by car, bicycle or on foot gives visitors a chance to glimpse the evasive Ajo lily along Estes Canyon. Ajo, Spanish for garlic, refers to the plant's edible bulb. It grows in washes along the 21-mile drive, providing a unique wildflower alternative to the prolific Mexican goldpoppy. Guided van tours and small exhibits enhance the designated wilderness area. Because of the site's proximity to the U.S./Mexico border, road closures and safety warnings may affect travelers. (520) 387-6849; www.nps.gov/orpi.

PICACHO PEAK STATE PARK

40 miles north of Tucson off Interstate 10, Exit 219

History buffs and wildflower seekers will rub shoulders in this historic park come springtime. Mexican goldpoppies come to life on the Sunset Vista Trail, and dozens of riders will re-enact Arizona's largest Civil War battle on March 10 and 11. (520) 466-3183; www.pr.state.az.us/Parks/parkhtml/picacho.html.

—Michael Famiglietti

online **Find more bloomin' bonanzas at arizonahighways.com (click on the March "Trip Planner").**

FLOWER POWER
Flapping its wings up to 80 times per second, this Anna's hummingbird (below left) fills up on the sugary syrup of a cactus bloom. PAUL AND JOYCE BERQUIST

Contrary to its name, the sand-dwelling sawtooth evening primrose reveals a softer side of the Navajo Indian Reservation (below right). JACK DYKINGA

But not all pollinators can produce millions of youngsters in the good flower years, which means they need some other strategy to take advantage of the seasonal wildflower bounty.

Cue the migratory pollinators—including bats and hummingbirds. These remarkable creatures follow a sequential blossoming of flowers from the South American tropics, into the Sonoran Desert and often farther into North America.

Nectar-sippers like lesser long-nosed bats follow two different corridors of blooming agaves through Mexico and into the desert. Often, they move from one safe roosting site to another, tucked into caves during the day, then spreading out at night to lick nectar from the pale, sweet-smelling flowers they prefer, including the saguaro's and agave's. Many agaves compete so fiercely to attract the attention of the bats that the plants literally kill themselves by putting all their reserves into growing a single, towering stalk loaded with flowers. The saguaros, with their huge, white flowers open for business all night, also rely on bats, although the deep-desert-adapted white winged doves work the saguaro blossoms during the day shift.

Bats have benefited from their long connection with plants, and they now account for 1,000 species and a surprising one-fourth of the world's mammals.

The springtime flower explosion in the Sonoran Desert also summons forth a migratory flash of hummingbirds, jeweled hovercraft unique to the New World. Although more than 300 species of hummingbirds flit through the tropics, 16 species live in North America. Along with New Mexico and Texas, the "sky island" mountain ranges of southeastern Arizona boast the greatest diversity of hummingbird species in North America.

Champion fliers like the tiny, aggressive rufus hummingbirds can fly thousands of miles each year to complete the longest migration route of any bird relative to body length. With flight muscles making up a quarter of hummingbirds' body weight, their hearts pound along at nearly 1,200 beats per minute so they can flap their wings at an average of 60 to 80 beats per second. They're the only bird that can hover and fly backward, and they can also dive at speeds of 60 mph. They prefer bright red tubular flowers, often with little scent—since flowers attract bird pollinators by sight rather than smell.

DRESSED FOR SUCCESS
The irresistibly fragrant aroma of magenta hedgehog cactus flowers and neon-yellow creosote blooms (left) can ensure big business from potential pollinators. TOM DANIELSEN

RITE OF SPRING
Owl clover and five-needle fetid marigold (left) and prickly pear cactus flowers (below) are typically sighted every spring in the Sonoran Desert, but with the perfect combination of water and winged creatures, a simple sight can blossom into a breathtaking landscape. BOTH BY RANDY PRENTICE

Biologists fret about the plight of many of these exquisitely adapted pollinators. Development, grazing, drought and other changes have encroached on the migratory corridor on which hummingbirds and bats depend. Bats have lost vital roosting spots. Native bees face debilitating competition from introduced European honeybees, which have in turn been displaced in some areas by much more aggressive Africanized honeybees. Introduced grasses have carried brushfires and choked out wildflowers in some areas. Cattle-grazing has hammered desert soils, changing the pacing and diversity of the wildflower outbreaks.

Still, the poppy seeds linger in the soil, waiting for the overture of that first deep winter rain. The bees play the piccolo of the first movement of the symphony as they tend their stores in their deep burrows, waiting for that rare blessing of a damp spring. The hummingbirds come in like the string section as they pause in their tropical scurry, feeling the urge to travel as the agaves pour their last energies into a towering stalk.

Cue the poppies.

Cue the pollinators.

Cue spring. AH

Frank Jennings joins his pollinator friends with a buzz of his own—but his is caffeine-related.

Eye for Love

Butterflies Seek the Ultimate Mate in the Ultraviolet

by Cheryl A. Sweet

PERCHED ON A PEBBLE in a desert wash northeast of Phoenix, the quarter-sized butterfly appears to be serenely sunning. Much more is happening, however, than meets the uninformed eye. On a mating mission, the male empress leilia displays a boldness far overshadowing his size. Wings outstretched toward the sun to elevate his body temperature for rapid-motion readiness, he chases birds, bigger butterflies or anything else daring to dart within his domain.

Focused on a nearby desert hackberry bush, where caterpillars of his species feed and pupate, the orange-brown butterfly pays intense attention to only one thing: female virgins, emerging from cocoons.

"This empress male is desperate to detect a female," quips butterfly biologist Ron Rutowski. An entomologist and behavioral ecologist at Arizona State University, Rutowski has been studying the relationship between butterfly vision and mating behavior for nearly 30 years. With some 12,000 butterfly species identified, behaviors preceding butterfly sex have been described in only a few dozen species.

Supported by the National Science Foundation, Rutowski's research is shedding new light on how butterflies recognize and seduce one another. "While we know something of mate-locating tactics in butterflies, there is much to learn," he says. "I'm always stunned to find that quite fresh females have already been mated, even in relatively low-density populations."

With empress leilias' mating period spanning March to November, favorite Arizona mating areas are washes by desert hackberry bushes in the Mazatzal Mountains. Bordered by Four Peaks to the south and extending north toward Payson, the area is ideal for studying this species' mating behavior.

Predominantly portrayed as carefree creatures feeding on flowers and flitting about with no apparent purpose, butterflies are actually extremely goal directed. Empress males spend their 10-day existence focused on passing their genes to as many females as possible, while females mate just once.

In the world of butterfly attraction, looks matter immensely to females, who call the sexual shots. Despite extreme nearsightedness, butterflies possess a visual ability linked to mating behavior that is unattainable by humans: They can detect ultraviolet light, thought to help females measure males' suitability.

"Females may visually assess the fitness and age of competing males by viewing ultraviolet scales on the males' wings through receptors in their eyes that enable them to see UV wavelengths," explains Rutowski.

Besides sending signals to females about the male's health, UV colors are thought to convey information about a male's potency. "When males are mating with females, they contribute not only sperm, but an enormous package of proteins and carbohydrates—around 6 percent of their body weight," explains doctoral student Nathan Moorehouse, who works in Rutowski's lab. "Females use this package, called the spermatophore, to produce eggs and to live longer. We think males of better quality or younger males might contribute more of this package during mating."

Rutowski's current research regards butterfly coloration. "One of the really unique things about butterflies," he notes, "is the diversity of mechanisms that they use to produce colors. This includes a variety of chemical pigments, like the carotenoids that make carrots orange, and microscopic structures like the particles in the sky that scatter blue light and the thin film of a soap bubble that causes its shimmering rainbow of colors."

To test his theory about female butterflies' preference for colorful males and the role of UV light, Rutowski and his team observed orange sulphur butterflies in Arizona alfalfa fields. "Studies from the 1970s had shown that female orange sulphurs find the ultraviolet reflectance of male wings attractive," notes Rutowski. "As a male's wings lose scales, his ultraviolet color diminishes with age.

"We wondered if age reduces a male's seductive charms. Our suspicions were confirmed when we found virgin females preferred males with intact wings to males with worn wings—a choice apparently driven by color, ensuring a younger mate."

What continues captivating a butterfly biologist for decades? "There are aspects of butterfly diversity and behavior we don't even know about," muses Rutowski. "For instance, how does courtship behavior vary among species and why? This type of behavior is difficult to observe. We've just scratched the surface in terms of knowing and understanding the diversity of courtship behaviors in butterflies."

Thriving in the Arctic tundra, in deserts, in humid rain forests and other habitats, butterflies have survived for 35 million years—with no end in sight. "With so many species living in so many types of environments," reasons Rutowski, "it's hard to imagine an ecological or other catastrophe that would wipe them completely off the face of the Earth." AH

ROYAL RESTING SPOT

The male empress leilia butterfly (opposite page) searches for mates in washes near desert hackberry bushes, where caterpillars of the species feed and pupate. Researchers say that ultraviolet light plays an important role in how male and female empress leilia butterflies (below) attract one another.

BOTH, RON RUTOWSKI

Earth, Rain, Wind and Sun

nature's dramatic concerto

Text and Photographs by Peter Schwepker

M

MY PHILOSOPHY on landscape photography tends to follow a cloudy sky, looking for formations of drama overhead, then capturing the magic orchestrated by clouds on the land. Storms are nature's way of bringing out the Earth's most spectacular moments.

The landscape will never quite be the same as it was during the passing of a storm on a particular day. So photographing before, during and after storms captures more than just a scene or location. It captures a moment in time.

The challenge, for me, is to allow the viewer to "feel" the mood and the light. If I can capture earth, wind, rain and sun in perfect concert, the viewer can feel the breeze and smell the freshness of the earth after a summer rain.

I watch the sky for another reason. Clouds give my photographs a painterly quality through the variance in light and shadow. I break many photographic composition rules to capture nature's light show. Following nature forces me to keep my mind open for things I had not foreseen, which represents the photojournalist coming out in me. When I have a clear Arizona day, I spend my time investigating light details on the earth like fall aspens reflected in a pond or the sun reflecting through the trees into a swirling creek. Storm or not, try to allow nature to paint the picture.

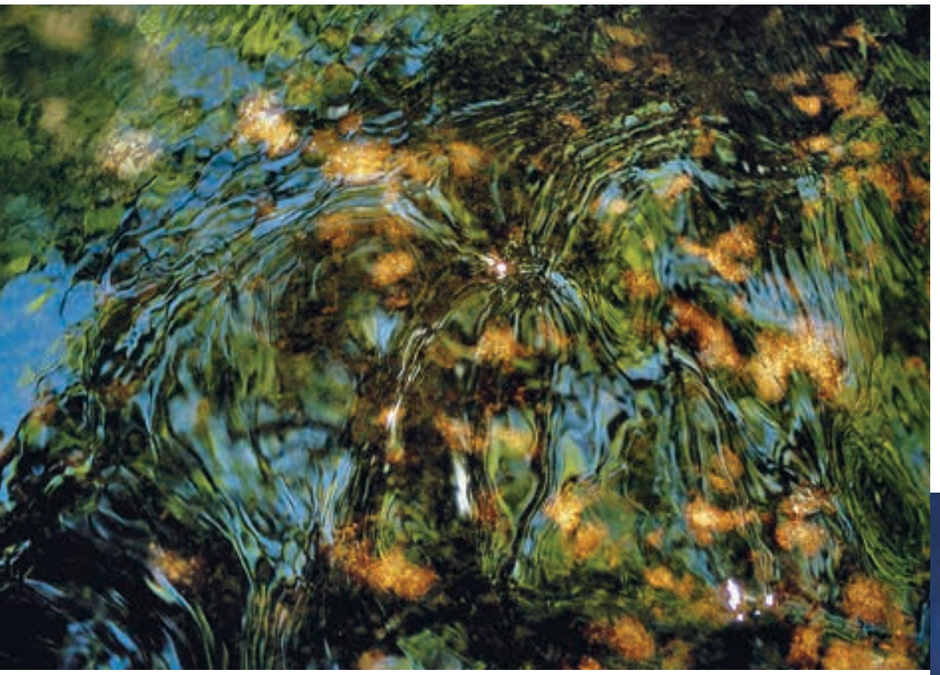
Waiting many hours for that perfect photographic concerto of the elements can be discouraging. But even when the light does not cooperate, I have had the privilege of being side-by-side with nature. This portfolio attempts to reflect my respect and love for nature. Each one of my photographs has with it a memory of place, time and circumstance. I am left with visions of grazing deer and elk or star trails across a night sky during a long exposure. I would not have seen any of it but for my love of nature photography. AH

STORM OF THE CENTURY **(Preceding panel) Lit by a flash from a portable strobe under brooding storm clouds, a red-stalked century plant towers above a rocky hilltop studded with prickly desert flora between the Verde Valley and Sedona.**

To order a print of this photograph, see inside front cover.

CRACKLING REFLECTION **Patient planning and endurance pay off in this image of an electric light show passing over Cathedral Rock reflected in a pool of water at the Sedona landmark's base.**

To order a print of this photograph, see inside front cover.



WATER MUSIC **Swirls of color reminiscent of Monet's impressionistic water lilies dance with the hues of the sky, trees and red rocks punctuated by midday sunlight on the surface of Beaver Creek. Because of its unpredictable outcome, the photographer considered this a "gamble shot."**

I TRY TO ALLOW NATURE TO PAINT THE PICTURE.

THE LANDSCAPE WILL NEVER QUITE BE THE SAME AS IT WAS DURING THE PASSING OF A STORM ON A PARTICULAR DAY.

FROZEN MOMENT **Shot with a telephoto lens on a frigid day, this view of 12,633-foot Humphreys Peak is literally "frozen" in time.**
To order a print of this photograph, see inside front cover.

THE VIEWER CAN FEEL THE BREEZE AND SMELL
THE FRESHNESS OF THE EARTH AFTER A SUMMER RAIN.

SOLO VERDE **A chorus of yellow-leafed autumn aspens appears to back up a solo renegade stubbornly clinging to its summer green.**
To order a print of this photograph, see inside front cover.

I WOULD NOT HAVE SEEN
ANY OF IT BUT FOR MY LOVE
OF NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY.

WALTZ OF THE WATERS **As unchoreographed as Oak Creek's flowing water itself, pirouetting patterns reflected from the colors of earth, grass and sunset sky are captured in a long exposure through a 150 mm lens (above).**

MIDNIGHT STAR TRAILS **During a 20-minute midnight exposure with a 50 mm wide-angle lens, the landscape (right) was illuminated with an SB-28 Nikon speed light.**

■ **To order a print of this photograph, see inside front cover.**

RISEN RIVER

Tres Rios Nature Festival Celebrates the Comeback Gurgle of the Gila

BY ROBIN N. CLAYTON

ONCE AGAIN SLUICING THROUGH arid deserts, the ghost of the Gila River has risen with a gurgle from its rocky burial, to the delight of bird-callers, trail-strollers and nature-lovers—at least for a little while.

To recognize the fitful comeback of a river that has nourished civilizations, the annual Tres Rios Nature Festival at the Base and Meridian Wildlife Area this month celebrates an ambitious restoration project that will restore a 7-mile stretch of one of the richest wildlife habitats in North America at the confluence of three of the state's major rivers—the Gila, the Agua Fria and the Salt. Children crowd the shores of an impoundment lake that belongs to the Buckeye Water District, baiting hooks and dropping lines while Arizona Game and Fish Department volunteers give hints. Occasional squeals draw a crowd to gaze at the prize catch of a nearby lucky angler, only to return to their own poles in hopeful anticipation that they, too, will catch one of the stocked fish.

Take notice: The Gila River is back, despite the drought and the dams and even the invasion of salt cedar, a now-obnoxious, foreigner imported to help in flood control.

Formerly, the Gila sustained ancient civilizations and spawned great floods. Now it is mostly a dammed-up trickle, except for occasional brief monsoon floods that pound into the hard desert floor before soaking into soft soil downstream. Along most of its length, the once-vital river is fitful and intermittent.

But that has begun to change. A hidden lake already hints at the plan to restore the corridor of cottonwood-willow habitat that will eventually allow the Gila River south of Buckeye to run as it did 50 years ago. The Gila ran past reeds where herons and egrets stood steady and watchful. The water that supported the herons and desert fish, beaver and hundreds of species of migrating birds also drew the Hohokam people to the area 1,500 years ago. They hacked out hundreds of miles of deep irrigation canals to divert its flows, and built great cities before disappearing mysteriously in the 1400s. Pioneers arrived in the mid-1800s and used the old Hohokam canals to irrigate their own crops.

Treasure in a Haystack **The Tres Rios demonstration wetlands include the Haystack site, which comprises two wetland basins. Used to study water quality and habitat development, the area doubles as a recreational haven with trails and areas for picnics, birding and photography.** LES DAVID MANEVITZ

"I want the kids to see it like it was when I was growing up, and be able to walk the river like I did. They should be able to see that," says Jackie Meck, lifetime Buckeye native and general manager of the Buckeye Water Conservation District.

The El Rio restoration project will turn a 17-mile reach of the Gila River, between the confluence of the Agua Fria River in Goodyear and Maricopa County Highway 85, into the meandering wetland he remembers. Using diverted farm runoff and effluent, the restoration project's river span will connect with another 7-mile segment where cottonwoods, willows and intermittent marshes already offer a growing network of hiking and riding trails for birders, joggers, strollers and nature-lovers.

A joint effort among the Flood Control District of Maricopa County, Arizona Game and Fish, Buckeye, Avondale and Goodyear, the main purpose of the restoration effort is to provide flood control. Since 1920, nine major floods have hit the area—including a devastating outburst in 1993 that sent floodwaters crashing downriver all the way to Yuma. The El Rio project will provide flood control to protect development in the booming region west of Phoenix. It will also create recreational opportunities by returning the land to the lush riparian habitat that existed before dams on the tributary Salt River in the early 1900s gradually reduced the river to a rocky bed of sporadic water flow.

But to restore that habitat, the introduced, fire-resistant, salt-tolerant, weedlike salt cedars must give way to the natural willow-and-cottonwood corridors, which some biologists say remains the most biologically productive habitat in North America.

Originally planted along the river to stabilize its banks, the salt cedars spread along the banks of both the Salt and the Gila to create a tough, scratchy wall of shrubby trees that can suck up 200 gallons of water per day. Not only did they effectively dehydrate the natural vegetation, but also the mass of vegetation actually forced the river from its bed.

"It forces the water out of the river bottom. The water can't flow through the trees, so it moves to the open space and the floodwaters spread out. Water flows to the path of least resistance. We want to keep it in the original river channel," Meck says. Although the cottonwoods and willows consume the same amount of the Gila's precious waters as salt cedars, their growth can be controlled.

One small lake in Avondale and a proposed Buckeye lake will provide the core of an eventual 17-mile-long project. Bank protection, levees, lakes and trees will restore the wildlife habit when project managers remove the salt cedars. A 50-acre demonstration area south of State Route 85 and west of Miller Road in Buckeye will provide a preview of the project by restoring a small area that burned in 2005. The demonstration project will test methods of replacing the salt cedars with natural vegetation and will gauge how many willows and cottonwoods it takes to restore the natural balance.

"They will fill in the area with natural foliage—cottonwoods and willows—and make it look like what we hope the rest of the project will," Meck says.

The festival gives nature lovers a chance to preview the proposed restoration. Just up the shoreline among the reeds, canoes launch into the Gila waters as festival visitors explore. Some study the reeds and skies with binoculars, hoping to catch a glimpse of wading birds or circling hawks. Others set off on guided wildlife and petroglyph hikes.

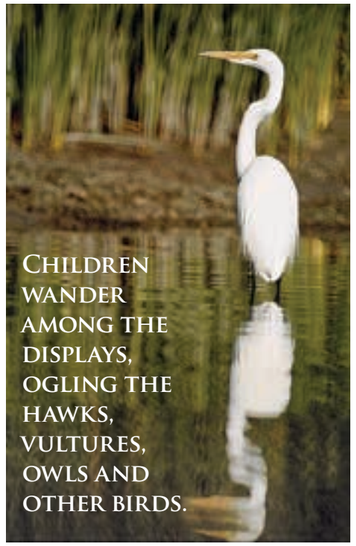
Children wander among the displays, ogling the hawks, vultures, owls and other birds. They gaze with fearful curiosity at venomous reptiles lurking in cages while wildlife experts teach them about the creatures.

Standing at the water's edge, it is easy to imagine the full force of the Gila, flowing past the mighty cottonwoods, bendable willows and reedy marshes, where wetland birds play hide-and-seek.

But Meck's fond memories are now taking concrete shape in the lethal loops of the red-tailed hawks, the thrashing of wings among the reeds and the gurgle of the life-bringing waters of the Gila. With a little luck and a lot of cooperation, future generations can run barefoot along the shores the Hohokam once loved.

Perhaps one day they will remember the river as always being there, the living force of the Phoenix area desert. AH

Robin N. Clayton lives in Glendale, but spends much of her time wandering the desert river areas west of Phoenix. Her first experience at the Tres Rios Festival sparked a love for the restoration project and drew her back as a volunteer for the event.



Forget Eagle-eye **The eyes of a great white egret easily spot prey below the water's surface, which the bird spears with pinpoint accuracy. This symbol of the National Audubon Society is making a comeback, much like the riparian corridors it stalks.** PETER ENSENBERGER

when you go

Location: Base and Meridian Wildlife Area on the Gila River adjacent to Phoenix International Raceway in Avondale.
Getting There: From Phoenix, take Interstate 10 west to the Avondale Boulevard exit. Go south 5 miles to the Gila River and turn east past the bridge at Indian Springs Road. The Buckeye Water Conservation District impoundment lake is open to the public only during the two-day Tres Rios Nature Festival.
Dates: March 17 and 18.
Hours: Saturday, 10 A.M. to 6 P.M.; Sunday, 10 A.M. to 4 P.M.
Fees: Admission is free; however, some activities require preregistration and fees. Activities include hikes to petroglyphs, bird-watching, wildlife tours, wildlife and environmental displays, entertainment and a fishing clinic.
Additional Information: (623) 204-2130; www.tresriosnaturefestival.com.

PURSUIT OF TRUTH

FACTS GET TRAMPLED IN A THRILLING CHASE OF THREE RECKLESS BANDITS

by Leo W. Banks | illustration by Kevin Kibsey

IT MIGHT WIN THE TITLE of the Arizona Territory's greatest chase.

Under pressure from a posse of U.S. marshals, three Utah cattle rustlers—Tom McCarty, Matt Warner and Josh Swett—abandon their stomping grounds at the Mexican border and flee north.

These young roustabouts, Swett with a bullet hole in his shoulder, make a bone-rattling, eight-day ride over the length of Arizona to Lee's Ferry on the Colorado River. They arrive at water's edge at a gallop, only to find the posse men still at their backs, and the boatman on the opposite bank.

Thinking quickly, Warner hollers to the boatman a $50 bet that he can't make it to the near bank in two minutes.

The boatman poles as fast as he can and thinks he's won. But for his trouble he gets a pistol in his ribs and orders to take the three outlaws back to the other side, pronto.

They land on Utah soil just as the frustrated marshals reach the water. The lawmen shout curses at the bad guys, who respond with taunts. For good measure, McCarty, Warner and Swett abduct the boatman and continue their wild escape, turning him loose miles away.

Thrilling, incredible, a classic episode of Western adventure—if it really happened. Some historians believe the Great Chase of 1883 is actually a great hoax.

Each of the outlaws later told his side of things in print. In 1930, when he was 70, Swett gave an interview that didn't appear in print for another 34 years. Warner included the chase story in his 1938 autobiography, *The Last of the Bandit Riders*, first published in *Cosmopolitan*, then a general interest magazine that often published Western stories.

But these recollections—56 years after the fact for Warner, 48 for Swett—demand skepticism on two major points.

First, the exciting riverside hostage-taking. It most likely was invented.

Prior to his death, P.T. Reilly, author of a history of Lee's Ferry, said that descendants of Warren Johnson—the ferry operator between 1879 and 1896—knew nothing of the episode. Reilly's conclusion? It never happened as Warner and Swett described it, since Johnson's family never mentioned it in their interviews with Reilly.

Second, Warner and Swett claimed they killed several U.S. marshals, but that doesn't hold up either. Such an event would've made headlines across Arizona, and it didn't.

But this doesn't mean the chase story is fake.

The third outlaw, McCarty, in recollections penned in 1898, 16 years after the fact, told the same basic story—with a less dramatic river crossing and with stockmen, not U.S. marshals, in pursuit.

"McCarty's story is much more compelling because he was such a straight shooter," says Cove, Oregon, author Jon Skovlin, who, with wife Donna, wrote a biography of Tom McCarty and his brother, Bill. "We're convinced the chase happened as he described it."

McCarty, born about 1850, was the most authentically criminal of the three. An accomplished cattle rustler, McCarty and Warner in the late 1880s and early 1890s recruited Butch Cassidy and other Wild Bunch members to rob banks and trains. McCarty became so well-known, the *New York Herald* dubbed him "the Napoleon of outlawry."

In 1883, he teamed with Warner and Swett near Guadalupe Canyon, along the Arizona-New Mexico border. He was still at loose ends many months after the death of his wife, Teenie, Warner's sister, and looking to bury his sorrow in excitement in a wild no-man's land then teeming with some of Tombstone's worst cowboy-rustlers.

After making a deal with a crooked rancher willing to buy stolen beef, McCarty said the outlaws found a box canyon to use as a temporary camp and began rounding up cows.

One day, with Warner manning their box-canyon camp, McCarty and Swett with a herd of cattle encountered four mounted cowboys. A gunfight erupted, and McCarty held the men off with his Winchester. But with darkness falling, the cowboys wouldn't give up.

As the two bandits stood in a cottonwood grove deciding what to do, they heard approaching footsteps. Swett called, "Halt!" The answering shot hit him in the right shoulder.

Swett called that he'd been hit, then yelled: "But, hell, I can pull a trigger yet!" This show of bravado sent McCarty into fits of laughter, whereupon one cowboy shouted, "We'll make you laugh before we're done with you fellows!"

McCarty emptied his six-shooter toward the voice and heard "one swear a terrible oath," as though wounded.

Moments later, McCarty spotted a man in a white shirt and vest approaching. He ordered the stranger to put up his hands, and told the others to quit firing if they wanted to see their friend alive.

This opened a strange dialogue between the two parties, McCarty eventually convincing his opponents to lay down their pistols. He promised they'd find them in the grove at daybreak.

McCarty interviewed his captive, a Denver newspaper reporter staying at his friend's ranch to write about a cattle roundup. But now he "only wanted to stay alive," McCarty recounted.

After making the reporter promise to send him a copy of his story about the shootout, he turned the scribe loose. Then, using skills he learned from his physician father, McCarty treated Swett, whose "skin was badly torn and bleeding quite freely."

Swett described McCarty working on him with the only supplies available—a bar of castile soap, horse liniment and a silk handkerchief.

"First he cut and peeled a willow switch and, with soap suds worked up on the silk handkerchief, he used the switch to force the handkerchief through the wound," Swett recalled. "Every time he pulled it through I thought I was going to die. Didn't even have whiskey to ease the pain. It hurt awful bad, but it must have been good for the next day the swelling began to go down."

'FIRST HE CUT AND PEELED A WILLOW SWITCH AND, WITH SOAP SUDS WORKED UP ON THE SILK HANDKERCHIEF, HE USED THE SWITCH TO FORCE THE HANDKERCHIEF THROUGH THE WOUND.'

After delivering the cattle to the unnamed buyer, McCarty, Warner and Swett rode north.

On the third day, they met a young cowboy who said posse men were hunting for rustlers riding big sorrel horses "about the color of them two," meaning two of McCarty's horses.

Abruptly, the cowboy recognized the trouble he'd found. He nervously climbed on his horse and rode west for a distance, whereupon, says McCarty, "he wheeled his horse and rode at a great speed toward the east."

That night McCarty couldn't sleep. "It seemed that the very air was whispering danger," he said.

He rousted his partners at 2 A.M. and convinced them to get moving. His premonition proved correct. Next daybreak, from a high ridge, he checked their back trail and spotted eight riders, armed with Winchester rifles, "coming at a very fast gait."

"It was now to be a race to get away," wrote McCarty.

Riding on grass and along streambeds to conceal their tracks, the outlaws avoided established roads and moved as fast as they could despite Swett's painful wound.

In their book, *In Pursuit of the McCartys*, the Skovlins trace the outlaws across the Gila River, up the San Carlos River basin, across the Salt River, up the Mogollon Rim, through the forests west of Show Low and on past Winslow.

They crossed the Little Colorado River near present-day Leupp, and galloped over the Painted Desert to Lee's Ferry, covering more than 400 miles in seven days.

In McCarty's account, the pursuing riders weren't in sight when the outlaws reached the river, and the boatman ferried them across without difficulty. With Swett in bad shape, the outlaws sought rest on the opposite bank.

But the posse men—three men pulling two packhorses—caught up after only half a day. "It struck me quite forcibly that they were the very men we did not wish to meet," wrote McCarty.

The outlaws hurried back onto their horses. "Before we had got out of sight from the river our friends with the pack horses were seen calling to the ferryman to come and put them across," wrote McCarty.

He made no mention of harassing the unnamed ferryman, so, most likely, the ferryman brought the posse across, and the chase continued into Utah.

But the outlaws' horses had weakened, and Swett insisted they steal more, saying he "wanted to ride one more fresh horse before he died."

They stole what they needed, but in the Mormon settlement of Kanab, the posse still clattering at their heels, Swett finally quit the ride. McCarty and Warner left him behind and rode on alone. They split up before long, too, ending the chase.

Weeks later, McCarty spotted a newspaper report stating that the Arizona posse had Swett arrested. But a jurisdictional dispute prevented his return to Arizona for trial. Instead, Utah held him for horse theft, and McCarty said he served a short term in the Utah penitentiary.

The identities of the posse men remain unknown today. But the Skovlins doubt they were lawmen.

"Lawmen aren't going to cross into Utah, out of their jurisdiction, for a couple of dollars a day," says Jon Skovlin. "They were probably ranchers who weren't going to give up."

As for McCarty and Warner, they never answered for their Arizona crimes. Warner landed in prison several times. But he straightened out and settled in Price, Utah, where, late in life, he became a justice of the peace and deputy sheriff. Swett lived in Nevada at the time of his 1930 interview, and probably died there.

After the episode, McCarty resolved to lead an honest life, "but as usual my evil spirit followed me." After an 1893 bank robbery in Colorado went bad, and two close relatives were killed, he fell from view, and, like many outlaws, went on to read reports of his death.

He reportedly retired to Oregon, and although he spent some time in the Carson City jail in 1877, he never did prison time before disappearing around 1917.

McCarty's and Warner's ties to the Wild Bunch raise an interesting possibility. Could the famous chase sequences in the 1969 movie *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*—during which Butch and Sundance keep asking, "Who are those guys?"—have been based on the Great Chase of 1883?

A second postscript to the story deals with the Denver reporter McCarty captured. He did publish a story on the shootout, and "this paper was mailed to me a long time after the event occurred," wrote McCarty. He was so impressed with its accuracy that he sent the writer a $50 bill as a Christmas present.

"If he ever should read this book," McCarty said, "he can always be sure that bad as I am in the eyes of the law, I always will remember him." AH

Leo W. Banks, who loves writing about Old West outlaws, says he got saddle sores just researching this story. He lives in Tucson.

Illustrator Kevin Kibsey is a frequent Arizona Highways *contributor. He also illustrated the* Arizona Highways *children's book,* Dr. Bird to the Rescue.

(Clockwise from top left) Touring Old Town Scottsdale by horse-drawn carriage; J. Chew Song's Mexican Imports; Porter's Western Store; Cavalliere's Blacksmith Shop; "The Cowboy" sign; (middle) Old Town Scottsdale sign.

GREAT SCOTT!

History tour of Old Town Scottsdale would please and confound its founders

If the courtyard figure facing Old Town Scottsdale could actually see, this bronze version of Winfield Scott wouldn't recognize the hip and trendy metropolis that has replaced the farming community Scott founded in 1888.

Scottsdale founder, U.S. Army Chaplain Winfield Scott

After plunking down a whopping $2.50 an acre to start a community that quickly blossomed into a town named after him, the Army chaplain couldn't have known that his orange groves, dairy farms and tent houses would be replaced by multistory office buildings, popular nightclubs and upscale condominiums. Fortunately, a few of his famous olive trees still exist, so visitors can glimpse traces of the agricultural mecca he once promoted.

The Scottsdale Historical Society's self-guided walking tour brochure invited my date and me on a time traveler's treasure hunt to see Old Town for ourselves. Complete with a side trip north of Indian School Road at Brown Avenue, our tour took us to the former site of the chaplain's house; it burned down after Scott's death in 1910. The commemorative statue located in what is now an office-complex courtyard seemed to say, "C'mon over!" So we did.

The six-block tour takes about an hour. But we got thirsty and decided to stay longer at a few stops—the Rusty Spur Saloon, where we listened to a country band play a few songs, and then Los Olivos Mexican Patio, where we dined on sweet corn tamales.

After entering the Little Red Schoolhouse, I was surprised to learn the "West's Most Western Town's" origins have little to do with cowboys. But what about the hitching posts and Western storefronts?

By Jackie Dishner Photographs by Don B. and Ryan B. Stevenson

Hikers dwarfed by the imposing arms of a saguaro cactus descend the Pinnacle Peak trail. In designated climbing areas, the 1.4 billion-year-old granite rock formations provide a challenging venue for experienced rock climbers.

KNOCKING ABOUT THE WEST'S MOST WESTERN TOWN

BY MARILYN HAWKES

The City of Scottsdale mixes urban living with Western style. Sleek, modern high-rises tower over low-slung Old West storefronts, and horse-drawn carriages clop past Hummers and stretch limos. If you're looking for something different to do in this city of contrast, here are four ideas.

SCOTTSDALE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART (SMOCA)

Even if you're not a fan of modern art, the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art has some distinctive architecture and a well-stocked museum store. SMoCA, the only museum in Arizona devoted to contemporary art, design and architecture, sits next to the Scottsdale Center for the Arts. Five galleries host changing exhibitions and a growing permanent collection. Local architect Will Bruder, whose work includes the Phoenix Central Library and the upcoming ASU Downtown Campus, designed the museum. An outdoor sculpture garden features the work of artist James Turrell. (480) 994-2787; www.smoca.org.

COSANTI

Cosanti

Just west of Scottsdale Road, renowned architect Paolo Soleri's rustic residence and sculpture studio nestles humbly among some of the largest homes in Paradise Valley. Soleri built Cosanti in the mid-1950s as an architectural experiment using concrete poured over earthen shell molds designed to stay cool in the summer and warm in the winter. An on-site foundry produces bronze and ceramic windbells that hang throughout the grounds, clanging in peaceful, harmonious tones. Bells range in price from $26 to thousands of dollars for a signed, one-of-a-kind piece. Toll-free (800) 752-3187, (480) 948-6145; www.arcosanti.org/expCosanti/.

HOUSE OF BROADCASTING, ARIZONA'S RADIO AND TELEVISION MUSEUM

Located in a converted second-floor apartment over the Santa Fe West store, this museum preserves and celebrates Arizona's broadcasting industry. Exhibits include memorabilia from local celebrities as well as national icons like Walter Cronkite and Peter Jennings. Don't miss Buck Owens' red rhinestone suit. (602) 944-1997; www.houseofbroadcasting.com.

PINNACLE PEAK PARK

Run, walk, climb or ride on horseback to discover one of Scottsdale's newest parks, once inhabited by the Hohokam people in the 13th century. The 3.5-mile Pinnacle Peak trail has an elevation gain of about 1,300 feet with stops along the way for impressive Valley vistas. Watch for desert tortoises, mule deer, javelinas and gray foxes along the trail. Depending on the time of year, the park staff offers interpretive tours, moonlit walks, astronomy evenings and wildflower walks. (480) 312-0990; www.scottsdaleaz.gov/parks/pinnacle/.

online **Discover the recreational, restorative and retail paradise of Scottsdale at arizonahighways.com (click on the March "Trip Planner").**

They were actually part of a successful 1940s marketing ploy.

Before then, Scottsdale didn't have Arabian horses. Nor did it have a rodeo parade. Instead, its miles of fruit trees, cotton fields and vineyards brought Mexican migrant farmers to town to help with the fieldwork. The workers even built their own adobe brick community on the site of the current Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts and civic plaza.

Resident historian and Scottsdale native JoAnn Handley provided historical gems, recalling that her parents moved to Scottsdale and attended the Little Red Schoolhouse. Built in 1909, it later served other functions before becoming home to the Scottsdale Historical Museum in 1991.

Inside the museum, only a few remaining pieces of the founder's estate—two chairs, documents, photographs and a coverlet—are on display. The simple furnishings represent a look inside what Handley calls "the spartan lifestyle of Scottsdale's early days."

Tent houses were, indeed, a common sight back then, complete with canvas roll-up windows. To create evaporative cooling during the summer months, they watered down the canvas windows and slept outside under the stars.

Only 100 people lived in Scottsdale in 1900, says Handley, and they were families of various Christian faiths. The chaplain was a Baptist, but he took turns conducting religious services, usually at the school, with other ministers in town.

"We didn't have a church or a saloon, but we survived," says Handley.

The tight-knit community gathered for picnics, swam in the canals and played donkey baseball. "The animal would buck you off his back; it was hilarious," says Handley.

After the chaplain died, Johnny Rose closed his grocery store and opened a pool hall. He renovated the building on the northeast corner of Main and Brown with the eye-catching white glazed bricks that still adorn the façade of J. Chew Song's Mexican Imports store.

Across the street, I searched for souvenirs at Bischoff's Shades of the West, built on the site of Scottsdale's first general store and post office. On the north side of Main Street, a drugstore used to exist where Saba's now sells cowboy boots. And you can still walk inside George Cavalliere's adobe blacksmith shop. He'd tried putting his tin-shed shop closer in town, but the town fathers didn't want to smell the fumes, so he built an adobe structure at what was then "the edge of town," two blocks away. The family still operates the business that specializes in ornamental design. And the carriage on the roof?

"Oh, that's just there for attention," says Handley, "but the shop is full of history itself, so you don't want to miss it."

Though the farms are gone and the only plow you might find is under cobwebs at Cavalliere's, it's clear Old Town Scottsdale hasn't lost its old-time charm.

I think Winfield Scott would be glad to see that. AH

While walking this tour, Phoenix-based Jackie Dishner says she was most fascinated to learn Arizona's first tent city came long before current Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio started his infamous tent jail.

Tempe-based photographers Ryan B. and Don B. Stevenson roamed Old Town for hours and discovered many sites and much history they have missed over the years.

when you go

Location: Scottsdale.
Travel Advisory: The best place to park is on the west side of the parking garage at First Street, east of Brown Avenue. Other parking spots throughout Old Town limit drivers to three hours. Pick up a copy of the Historic Old Town Scottsdale walking tour brochure and other historic property listings at the Scottsdale Historical Society (Little Red Schoolhouse), 7333 E. Scottsdale Mall. (480) 945-4499; www.scottsdalemuseum.com.
Additional Information: Scottsdale Convention & Visitors Bureau, (480) 421-1004; www.scottsdalecvb.com.

along the way

Revenge of the Birdlady

by Kathleen Walker illustration by Joseph Daniel Fiedler

THE BIRDS don't come to my piece of the desert. No more mourning doves lulling me into the day. I even miss the idiot woodpecker who worked my metal chimney like a Gatling gun every dawn at 5 A.M. The parades of quail, top knots a-flopping, marching past my gate—gone. The Birdlady got them.

In the midst of some obsession, this neighbor decided to feed the birds of southern Arizona, all of them. She began with a few handfuls of seeds, a few feeders, some suet and seed-covered gewgaws. New flight patterns of the local birds began to emerge. Quails made their little tracks to her place. Cactus wrens deserted their cacti. Within a matter of weeks, a visit to this neighbor took on all the aspects of a lone Piper Cub flying into 50 B-17s heading for Berlin on a World War II bombing mission.

I'd round the corner and here they'd come, a gray mass flying right at me, their screams joining my own as I covered my head with my arms. Other birds, driven hysterical by the interruption of their constant feeding, would slam into the Birdlady's windows, knocking themselves silly.

The Birdlady expanded her feeding sites into the desert. She would disappear into the cactus thicket with her 20-pound bag of seed and moments later reappear like a wraith. I lost about 10 years of my life on a morning walk because of one of those surprising glides out of the desert. Shadowy movements in the underbrush out here are never a good sign.

I had already lost a decade to another desert shadow. This one stepped out of the cacti in the form of a great hairy beast the size of a Volkswagen Beetle. His tusks, 3 feet long, curled like rigatoni. His black pebble eyes riveted on mine. Then, he lifted one satanic hoof and growled. The King of Javelinas had arrived.

I moved, slowly and backward, croaking, "Nice piggy, piggy, piggy," in what was left of my voice. He kept watching until I broke into a full hell-bent-for-Texas retreat. This story kept my Connecticut Yankee mother housebound for the duration of her annual winter visit.

Wait till she hears about the bear.

The general belief holds that the Birdlady's feedings have upset the balance of nature in this part of the Sonoran Desert. Never has so much birdseed been wheeled out of the local hardware store. And, as our ever-fatter feathered friends gorge, so do those who dine on bird.

We've always had our bobcats and coyotes, but they used to be just a whisper of a speckled pelt or skinny body, gone before you knew they were there. Now we've got bobcats so satiated you stumble over them rolling on their backs, legs pawing at the air. Coyotes saunter past in pairs, waiting for the next seating in the paloverde thicket. The smacking of lips can be heard everywhere. But bobcats and coyotes come with desert living. Bears are a whole different matter.

The Birdlady made the first sighting. She drove down the road, yelling a warning to me and my dog Daisy out for our morning stroll.

"A bear," she shouted. "Right up there," she motioned back up the road.

"No, no," I said. "That's just the big red dog some moron lets out every morning to scare the life out of everybody."

"No, a bear." Her eyes were wild. "He was standing up. A big bear."

Nobody believed her. How could you, a woman always covered with birdseed and feathers? But, a bear it was, down from the mountains to the north, to feed on garbage, some said. Others grimaced and nodded in the direction of my neighbor's feeding sites as the real cause for the arrival.

"He's shy," came the report of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, which apparently planned to limit its initial involvement to character judgments.

Shy? Was he going to lower his head and give me those big black eyes all winking and blinking, all golly gee, with one big old foot kicking at the dust? No. He was going to eat my dog and then me.

They did say he wouldn't like noise. Then, I would sing as I walked, loud and happy. That first song shocked me more than it would ever shock a bear.

I opened my mouth wide, stretched back my neck and pronounced melodically at the top of my lungs: "FROGGY WENT A-COURTIN' AND HE DID RIDE, UH-HUH, UH-HUH."

Good grief, where did this come from, what childhood memory, what kindergarten morning, what Burl Ives sing-along resided in the recesses of my brain? And why? Not only did I remember the song, I remembered every word, every verse, every hillbilly nuance, and so would every neighbor in a 5-mile radius. All this from a woman who can barely remember where she's put the car keys six seconds after getting out of the car.

The bear went on to meet his demise on a nearby golf course, shot by some branch of the government who knew the truth of bears. He had already been removed once from dangerously peopled territory. He just liked his garbage too much. Which leaves us only the coyotes, the bobcats, the King of the Javelinas and the Birdlady.

"Hawks," somebody shouted angrily at her yesterday. "You've brought hawks." Like that would be an insult. AH

by Brian Minnick photographs by Richard K. Webb

A chorus of birds, bighorns and breezes plays on Rose Peak

High Note

FROM TALKATIVE BIRDS, deer and bighorn sheep, to mines, grizzled road workers, and trucks with house-high tires, an excursion to Rose Peak, in east-central Arizona, offers the traveler a look into some of Arizona's most beautiful landscapes, the highs of Mother Nature.

A musty forest greets us at the trailhead. Billowing clouds surrounding Rose Peak have dumped enough rain to make the forest floor spongy. Two Phoenix refugees, Josh Hart and I relish the cool 46-degree weather as we begin climbing on the 8,786-foot-high mountain, the highest in eastern Arizona's Blue Range Primitive Area. The broad trail quickly narrows after passing through a wire gate fastened with a bough of oak. The yellowing ferns and late-blooming purple Whipple's penstemon covering the path testify to the trail's light use.

The steep trail and elevation strain our lowlander lungs, demanding a few short rests, during which two whitetail does eye us warily from above. We make it halfway up the trail, where the pitch becomes steep and turns into a series of meandering switchbacks. The forest has a rich diversity of midsized ponderosa pine and Gambel oak trees, which block the midmorning sun peeking through an opening in the clouds. A small patch of aspens remains about three-fourths of the way up, but this is the only evidence of the majestic white-barked tree. As we reach the crest, the pines yield to Gambel oaks.

Although it is listed as a half-mile, the trail's twists and turns and overall steepness, make it feel longer. A fire tower, redone in 1981, is a welcome sight, as the thin mountain air takes a toll on us desert rats. Near the fire tower, the peak boasts a small hut and an outhouse for the lucky soul who lives here in the summer watching for fires.

The view from the top reveals a sea of green, with wilderness areas rolling off in every direction. Veiled in ominous dark clouds to the east, the Blue Range Primitive Area stretches into New Mexico. Far north in the White Mountains resides Hannagan Meadow. To the west, the skyline drops into miles of uninhabited chaparral forest on the San Carlos Apache Indian Reservation. To the south lie Eagle Creek, the San Francisco River and the 10,713-foot-high sky island of Mount Graham.

We remain all alone, save for the distant sound of an occasional passing car on U.S. Route 191, dubbed the Coronado Trail after the Spanish explorer Francisco Vasquez de Coronado. While on the summit, our thoughts turn toward Coronado, who entered Arizona more than 460 years ago on his ill-fated search for Cibola and the Seven Cities of Gold. If Coronado did pass by Rose Peak on his search, surely a scout would have come here to peer into the distance for a glimpse of a glistening city of gold.

The clouds congeal into an approaching storm, and we decide standing at the bottom of a 30-foot metal tower is not a place for idle conversation should lightning strike. We descend this beautiful peak, named for wild roses daubing its northern face, to the serenade of a white-throated sparrow, to which we wave goodbye. AH

TIPTOP TOWER The overgrown trail leading to the summit of Rose Peak reveals one of many fire lookout towers in the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. The vantage point also offers scenic nature views rolling in every direction, from the bushy growth of the Blue Range Primitive Area to the skylines of surrounding mountains.

PLANT POWER Framing a layered view looking toward the San Carlos Apache Reservation and Mogollon Rim, a profusion of plant life stands as a testament to the light traffic near Rose Peak's summit.

trail guide

Length: 1 mile round-trip.
Elevation Gain: 360 feet.
Difficulty: Moderate.
Payoff: Cool temperatures, seclusion and awe-inspiring view.
Location: 53 miles north of Clifton on U.S. Route 191.
Getting There: From Phoenix, travel east on U.S. Route 60 to Globe. Take U.S. Route 70 east 77 miles to U.S. 191, past Safford. Drive northeast on U.S. 191 for 34 miles to Clifton, continuing north on 191 for another 53 miles to the Rose Peak (No. 345) trailhead. Parking is on the east side of the road.
Additional Information: (928) 687-1301; www.fs.fed.us/r3/asnf/contact.

online **Before you go on this hike, visit arizonahighways.com for other things to do and places to see in this area. You'll also find more hikes in our archive.**

by Peter Aleshire, editor

Pete and Kelly's Excellent Adventure

Search for Saddle Mountain wildflowers turns into a mud hole too far

I AM ABSOLUTELY, positively determined to impress Kelly.

He's the *Arizona Highways* director of marketing and one charming son-of-a-gun. By contrast, I am funny-looking but well-traveled.

And now with my editorial reputation on the line, I have vowed to impress him with wildflowers, within 65 miles of downtown Phoenix. As we speed out Interstate 10 past Buckeye, I'm thinking, *What the heck was I thinking?* Wildflowers are like lightning strikes: Even if you run around on a golf course with a 10-foot metal pole in a thunderstorm, you can only hope for a strike. Only a fool guarantees a lightning strike.

Fortunately, I cultivate clever friends. Knowing that Director of Photography Peter Ensenberger hangs out with photographers who will drive 300 miles on the rumor of a poppy patch, I seek his suggestion. Saddle Mountain in the Eagletails, recommends Ensenberger.

So off we go, Kelly oozing charm and me spitting out factoids like bug splats on the window.

In an hour, we approach the volcanic contortion of mountains that once harbored the sacred sites and hunting grounds of the Hohokam, who built a complex civilization along the intersection of the Salt, Verde and Gila rivers back where Phoenix now sprawls.

Today, these mountains harbor another implausible treasure: wildflowers.

The winter-summer dual rainy seasons of the Sonoran Desert produce perhaps the greatest flourish of wildflowers on the planet. Of course, most of the brilliant displays of spring wildflowers occur in deserts and arid regions. Elsewhere, reliable rains nourish year-round plants. But in the desert, the year-rounders must space themselves out—leaving lots of open ground for wildflowers in the rare, wet years—maybe once every three to five years locally and once a decade regionally. In key areas after a wet year, up to 200,000 wildflower seeds await in a single square-yard of dry desert soil. But the displays remain maddeningly, wonderfully fitful. That perfect year requires a 1-inch downpour in autumn to trigger germination of the buried seeds, followed by another 4 to 7 inches of rain scattered throughout the next five months, according to *A Natural History of the Sonoran Desert*. But even then, weeds spurred by summer rains, winter frosts, premature warm spells and population booms among ants or kangaroo rats can smother a good wildflower year.

So I can only hope for the best as we turn off the good gravel road onto the four-wheel-drive road leading up Saddle Mountain.

At the base of the hill, I pull over in triumph.

The slope ahead glows yellow with brittlebushes, offset by brilliant patches of poppies and eyeball-popping purple orgies of owl clover.

"Wow," says Kelly. "Sweet."

I smirk for a moment before grabbing my camera and charging out into the mountain of flowers, lost in Oz. An hour later, I am smeared with pollen, and Kelly looks ever so slightly bored.

Happy as a bee on nectar, I resolve to pad my triumph as a tour guide.

"I've got petroglyphs and I've got herons about 50 miles south," I say.

"Sounds good," he says, still ever-so-cool.

So we set out for Gila Bend along a back road. We pick our way past the flowers, over the saddle, down the backside of the ridge and on a couple of miles to Elliot Road, which runs through farmland before reconnecting to Buckeye Road. Half a mile later, we turn south on Old Highway 80, which runs along the Gila River. The Gila once nourished ancient civilizations, but now flows only when heavy rains force water releases from the string of reservoirs that sustain Phoenix. On this wet year, water rushing down the Gila has summoned the ghostly Painted Rock Reservoir back from the dead.

So we trundle about 30 miles on down the paved road to Gila Bend, then continue west a few miles on Interstate 8 to Painted Rock Dam Road.

Roughly 13 miles up that road, we turn aside at the sign directing us to the Painted Rocks Petroglyph Site. The Hohokam tended their crops along the then-reliable Gila for nearly 1,000 years, before vanishing mysteriously in the 1400s. On this small hill, they incised on boulders a demented dance of human figures, animals and geometric patterns, pecking out the shapes with painstaking care in the thin layer of desert varnish on the rocks' surface.

"Wow," says Kelly. "Cool."

I can do no wrong.

So I figure I'll finish with a flourish—flocks of water birds spattering about on the surface of Painted Rock Reservoir.

Heading back toward Gila Bend, I turn on a dirt road heading down to the reincarnated lake. The thready road comes suddenly

A PURPLE BLAZE
A vibrant field of owl clover comes to life in the shadow of the Eagletail Mountains. GEORGE STOCKING
To order a print of this photograph, see inside front cover.

ON THE ROCKS
Ancient petrogylphs, etched by the Hohokam Indians in the 1300s, adorn basalt rocks about 20 miles from Gila Bend. PETER ALESHIRE

TOUGH AS NAILS
Hardened *Arizona Highways* Editor Peter Aleshire fights the mud at Painted Rock Reservoir, trying to free his Jeep. KELLY MERO

to the flat surface of the lake, which has already peaked and started to recede. The ground is just muddy enough to make my Jeep impressive.

So I back up the Jeep and turn it around smartly. Well, not that smartly. Dumbly, if you must know.

Off the compacted road, the Jeep begins to sink into the mud. I gun it. Do not stop when you're sinking. Momentum is your friend. Good advice. But add this codicil: Don't turn the wheel too sharply when you gun it.

The wheels cut into the muck, the Jeep settles on its belly and the wheels spin uselessly.

I'm stuck—really, really stuck.

Kelly steps out carefully, somehow not sinking into the mud. He then stands calmly on the hard-packed road, ready to call out helpful suggestions.

Avert your eyes now: This next interlude involves substantial flopping about in the mud to find rocks and sticks to jam under the tires, followed by much spinning of tires and the smell of burning rubber. So I pull out the high-lift jack, build a foundation of rocks and sticks to avoid sinking out of sight into the mud, then jack up the front and shove it to the side off the jack so the front end will bounce to earth free of the self-created rut.

But as I prepare to repeat the process on the back end, I discover I cannot make the bumper hook on the jack go down. The little lever-thingy is stuck. I bang, bash, drop, kick and curse. Nothing.

Kelly wanders over, cocks his head and says, "Trouble?"

I briefly consider hitting him with the jack, but then decide I would rather watch him flounder about in the mud. So I hand him the jack.

He does something graceful and offhand with the little lever thing, which immediately releases.

He hands me back the jack.

So I lever out the back end, regain the security of the road and flee Painted Rock Reservoir. As we return to the pavement, basketball-sized clumps of mud spin off the tires and clang against the underside of the Jeep. Kelly leans back, without a care in the world.

"Sure beats working," he observes.

I nod, abashed.

"Great flowers," he adds.

He's absolutely right.

Sure is hard to hate those charming guys. AH

route finder

Note: Mileages are approximate.

- **Beginning in Phoenix**, drive west on Interstate 10. Take Exit 94, Tonopah Road, and drive south 3.5 miles to Buckeye-Salome Road.
- **Turn right** (west) onto Buckeye-Salome Road for .5 of a mile to 427th Avenue.
- **Turn left** (south) onto 427th Ave., a rough unpaved road leading up Saddle Mountain.
- **Continue driving** on the unpaved road over the saddle to Elliot Road.
- **Turn left** (east) onto Elliot Road, driving approximately 10 miles.
- **Turn right** (south) onto Buckeye-Salome Road and drive 2 miles.
- **Turn right** (west) onto Old Highway 80, driving for 33 miles to Gila Bend.
- **At Gila Bend**, take Interstate 8 west for 12.5 miles to Painted Rock Dam Road at Exit 102.
- **Turn right** onto Painted Rock Dam Road and follow it for 10.7 miles to Rocky Point Road, an unpaved side road that leads to the petroglyph site after .6 of a mile. (Painted Rock Dam is closed to the public.)
- **Return** to Painted Rock Dam Road and backtrack to return to I-8, driving east for 12.5 miles to Gila Bend.
- **Turn left** (north) onto State Route 85; drive for 34 miles to Interstate 10 East.

travel tips

Vehicle Requirements: Parts of this route require high-clearance, four-wheel-drive vehicles.
Warning: Back-road travel can be hazardous. Be aware of weather and road conditions. Carry plenty of water. Don't travel alone, and let someone know where you are going and when you plan to return.
Travel Advisory: Please preserve the Painted Rocks Petroglyph Site by not climbing or writing on the rocks. This is an important archaeological site overseen by the Bureau of Land Management.
Additional Information: (623) 580-5500; www.blm.gov/az/pfo/paint.htm.

THE STUFF OF DREAMS
In the valleys below Saddle Mountain, Arizona's most photographed wildflower, the Mexican goldpoppy, opens only for stark sunlight. PETER ENSENBERGER
■ To order a print of this photograph, see inside front cover.